

BART EHRMAN'S PROBLEM IS GOD

July 23, 2009 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

Bart Ehrman is the author of “God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question--Why We Suffer.” Ehrman is a “biblical scholar” who rejected his fundamentalist roots for the deadly wilderness of agnosticism. Today he majors in criticizing the New Testament Christian faith even while pretending to respect it. Because of his unbelief, he has become something of a mainstream media darling. He has been interviewed on the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, National Public Radio, National Geographic, BBC, the Washington Post, CNN, and others.

Ehrman holds the chair of religious studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where he is busy destroying any Christian faith his students might possess, and he has published many books tearing down the Bible for a wider audience.

FROM FUNDAMENTALIST TO AGNOSTIC

In his book *Misquoting Jesus*, Ehrman describes his conversion from belief to unbelief. He was raised in the Episcopal Church but made a profession of faith in Christ at age 15 through a charismatic youth group. He memorized “entire sections” of Scripture and was convinced that the Bible is “God’s words.” He told “everyone about Christ” and even influenced his parents to leave the Episcopal Church for a more conservative evangelical faith. (His mother, brother, and sister have remained in that faith and have not followed Bart’s example. He says, “My mom is a strong evangelical; we talk basketball; we don’t talk religion.”) He “became a gung-ho Christian, a fundamentalist who believed the Bible contained no mistakes” (“Agnostic Author Bart Ehrman Picks Apart the Gospels,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 2006).

After graduating from high school he attended Moody Bible Institute, where he discovered the field of textual criticism and began to have doubts about the divine inspiration and preservation of the Bible. His doubts increased while studying the Greek New Testament at Wheaton College and grew even stronger at the very liberal Princeton Theological Seminary where he studied under Bruce Metzger. Today Ehrman calls himself a “happy agnostic” and believes that man simply ceases to exist at death, “like the mosquito you swatted yesterday” (“The Book of Bart,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 2006).

Ehrman rejects the deity, sinlessness, miracles, and bodily resurrection of Jesus. He believes that the Christian faith is a myth and that at least 19 of the books in the New Testament are forgeries.

BUILDING A STRAW MAN FUNDAMENTALISM

Those who have rejected a biblicist background typically misrepresent the “fundamentalist” faith and promote exceptions as rules. They dig up the wildest examples of hypocrisy and foolishness done in the name of fundamentalism and use that to discredit the Bible and to justify their unbelief. Ehrman is guilty of this. In describing his spiritual background, Ehrman describes an event that occurred when his father was dying of cancer. His charismatic youth group leader visited the hospital and “used a bottle of hotel shampoo to ‘anoint’ his father, and tried to persuade his father to confess specific sins” (“Former Fundamentalist ‘Debunks’ Bible,” CNN, May 15, 2009). Ehrman says he was angry at the man for acting “self-righteous” and “hypocritical.” This event, though, does not reflect negatively on a biblicist faith. It simply proves that this particular youth leader was a misguided man. The Bible does not instruct us to anoint people with shampoo. It does not promise physical healing. This case is a straw man, a red herring.

SCHOLARLY BUT NOT WISE

Ehrman is very scholarly but that does not mean that he has the ability to reason well. In fact, he comes to some very unreasonable conclusions. He claims, for example that the disciples didn’t actually see Jesus rise from the dead but that they merely saw this in “vision.” He says, “My best guess is that what happened is what commonly happens today when someone has a loved one die--they sometimes think they see them in a vision; I think some of the disciples had visions” (“Former Fundamentalist,” CNN, May 15, 2009).

First of all, this is a goofy statement, and we are not surprised that Ehrman gives no documentation of such a thing. While it is true that a few people today claim to see their deceased loved ones in a vision this is not something that “commonly happens.” And it definitely does not “commonly happen” that people today claim that their loved ones rose bodily from the dead!

And if it were true that Christ’s disciples merely saw Him in a vision, this would mean one of two things. It would mean that they baldly lied about what they had seen, because the writers of the New Testament claimed to have seen the risen Christ, to have talked with Him and touched Him. Or it would mean that they were deluded. And if it was a delusion, it was a mass delusion, because Paul says over 500 saw the risen Christ at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Ehrman's "explanation" of the empty tomb and the disciples' claims to have witnessed the resurrection of Christ is no explanation at all. The man knows a lot of things from reading ancient manuscripts, but he does not have the ability to reason from those facts properly. His alleged great scholarship does not equal wisdom.

GROSS FACTUAL ERRORS

Though Ehrman claims to hold the high ground of scholarship and intellect, he makes childish errors of fact. For example, he says that the belief in the Bible as infallibly inspired began in the 19th century.

"Church historians have traced the view, rather precisely, to the Niagara Conference on the Bible, in the 1870s, held over a number of years to foster belief in the Bible in opposition to liberal theologians who were accepting the results of historical scholarship. In 1878 the conference summarized the true faith in a series of fourteen statements. The very first one -- to be believed above all else -- was not belief in God, or in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It was belief in the Bible" (Ehrman, "Jesus Saves, Not the Bible," newsweek.washingtonpost.com, May 1, 2009).

In fact, the writers of the New Testament taught that the Scripture is infallible. Paul said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). And Peter wrote, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

Even if it were true that Paul and Peter didn't write those epistles, it is still true that whoever wrote them taught the infallibility of biblical inspiration 2,000 years ago!

Further, ancient creeds described the infallible inspiration of Scripture long before 1870. Consider the Westminster Confession of 1646, which stated not only the infallible inspiration but also the providential preservation of Scripture:

"The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), BEING IMMEDIATELY INSPIRED BY GOD, and by His singular care and providence, KEPT PURE in all ages, are therefore AUTHENTICAL; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them."

Those words were written more than 220 years before the modern fundamentalist movement was born. And we could give many other quotes from Christians through the centuries who believed that the Bible is the infallibly inspired Word of God.

John Wycliffe, the father of the English Bible, made the following statement in the 14th century:

“Did not the Holy Ghost give the Word of God at first in the mother-tongue of the nations to whom it was addressed? Why do you speak against the Holy Ghost? You say that the Church of God is in danger from this book. How can that be? Is it not from the Bible only that we learn that God has set up such a society as a Church on the earth? Is it not the Bible that gives all her authority to the Church? Is it not from the Bible that we learn who is the Builder and Sovereign of the Church, what are the laws by which she is to be governed, and the rights and privileges of her members? Without the Bible, what charter has the Church to show for all these? It is you who place the Church in jeopardy by hiding the Divine warrant, the missive royal of her King, for the authority she wields and the faith she enjoins” (Fountain, *John Wycliffe*, pp. 45-47).

In the early 17th century the King James Translators made the following statement of their faith in the divine inspiration of Scripture in their Preface to the Readers:

“And what marvel? The original thereof being from heaven, not from earth; the author being God, not man; the enditer [composer], the holy spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets; the Pen-men such as were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God’s spirit; the matter, verity, piety, purity, uprightness; the form, God’s word, God’s testimony, God’s oracles, the word of truth, the word of salvation.”

God’s people have never worshipped the Bible, but they have understood that they know nothing for sure about God apart from the Bible and they have honored it as the infallible Word God, which it claims to be and by “many infallible proofs” shows itself to be to those who have the eyes to see (Acts 1:3).

NO MIRACLES

Ehrman doesn’t believe in miracles. At a end of a debate with William Craig at College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, in 2006, Erhman was asked by a member of the audience, “Given your historical method, has any miracle ever occurred, and if so, which ones? And if not, might it be that you willfully refuse to believe in miracles?” (“Is There Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus?” March 28, 2006, <http://www.bringyou.to/apologetics/p96.htm>).

Ehrman did not answer either of these questions. By his own witness, therefore, he does not believe that any miracle has ever occurred. He is a secular evolutionist who does not believe in a supernatural God. This has nothing to do with facts; it has everything to do with willful spiritual blindness. “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

BIBLE A LIE BUT STILL “IMPORTANT”

Though Ehrman says that the Bible is largely a fairy tale and a forgery, he also would have us believe that it is “an important body of work” (“Former Fundamentalist,” CNN, May 15, 2009).

In fact, if the Bible is what Ehrman claims it is, it is the most wicked and damnable book ever written, because its prophets claimed to speak the very words of God and its apostles claimed to preach the one and only gospel of eternal salvation. If they were just a pack of deluded liars, the Bible is not merely ridiculous; it is vile.

ROBERT DICK WILSON: A SCHOLAR WITH A DIFFERENT CONCLUSION

In his books, lectures, and interviews, Ehrman would have his listeners believe that no real biblical scholar accepts the Bible’s historicity as defensible, but this is nonsense. Many great scholars have defended the Bible as divinely inspired.

ROBERT DICK WILSON has been called “probably the outstanding authority on ancient languages of the Middle East.” When he graduated from Princeton at age 20, he could read the New Testament in nine languages. Eventually he learned 45 languages, including all of the languages into which the Bible was translated prior to 600 A.D. He did post-graduate work at the Humboldt University of Berlin and taught at Western Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary. At age 25, Wilson decided to dedicate the rest of his life to investigate the historicity of the Bible to see if it could be defended against the onslaught of theological modernism. Based on the longevity of his ancestors, he estimated that he might have 45 more years to dedicate to his project. Dividing this into three periods, he devoted the first 15 years to mastering every language that had a bearing on the text of the Old Testament, the next 15 years to the study of the text of the Old Testament itself, looking at every one of its one and a quarter million letters, and the final 15 years to writing down the results of his research (“The Remarkable Robert Dick Wilson,” *Christian Courier*, April 24, 2000). Among the languages he learned were Babylonian, Ethiopic, Phoenician,

Aramaic, Egyptian, Coptic, Persian, Armenian, Arabic, Syriac, and Egyptian. Wilson authored *Introductory Syriac Method and Manual* (New York: Scribners, 1891), *Elements of Syriac Grammar by an Inductive Method* (New York: Scribners, 1891), *Notes on Hebrew Syntax* (Allegheny, 1892), *The Lower Criticism of the Old Testament as a Preparation for the Higher Criticism* (Princeton: C.S. Robinson, 1901), *A Hebrew Grammar for Beginners* (Leipzig: W. Drugulin, 1908), *The Present State of the Daniel Controversy* (New York: Bible Teachers Training School, 1919), *Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* (Chicago: Sunday School Times, 1922), *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times, 1926), *The Radical Criticism of the Psalter* (London: Victoria Institute, 1927), and *Studies in the Book of Daniel* (Vol. 1: New York: Putnam, 1917, Vol. 2: New York: Revell, 1938). Many of Wilson's articles were published in the *Princeton Theological Review* and other magazines. The Presbyterian Church of America's Historical Center lists over 100 of his published writings.

Wilson concluded, "I have come to the conviction that no man knows enough to attack the veracity of the Old Testament. Every time when anyone has been able to get together enough documentary 'proofs' to undertake an investigation, the biblical facts in the original text have victoriously met the test" (R. Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*).

When asked what he tried to give to the estimated 2,000 students that sat under his ministry, Wilson replied, "I try to give them such an intelligent faith in the Old Testament Scriptures that they will never doubt them as long as they live. I try to give them evidence. I try to show them that there is a reasonable ground for belief in the history of the Old Testament. I've seen the day when I've just trembled at undertaking a new investigation, but I've gotten over that. I have come now to the conviction that no man knows enough to assail the truthfulness of the Old Testament. Whenever there is sufficient documentary evidence to make an investigation, the statements of the Bible, in the original texts, have stood the test" (Robert Dick Wilson, *Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* foreword by Philip Howard, 1922).

Why did Robert Dick Wilson believe the Bible and teach his students to trust it and believe in God, while Bart Ehrman disbelieves the Bible and encourages his students to be skeptics? It's not a matter of Ehrman having superior scholarship. It is a matter of faith. As Jesus said, an unbelieving heart will not be convinced though it witnesses someone rise from the dead (Luke 16:31).

GROVELING FOR BEETLES OR PLUCKING VIOLETS?

Wilson had liberal scholars (e.g., Bart Ehrman) in mind when he wrote:

“Notwithstanding this evident plan and purpose of a divine redemption which runs all through the Scriptures, there are today many professedly Christian writers who treat of the Israelitish religion as if it were a purely natural development. They diligently pick out every instance of a superstitious observance, or of a departure from the law, or of a disobedience to the divine commands, as if these represented the true religion of ancient Israel. They cut up the books and doctor the documents and change the text and wrest the meaning, to suit the perverted view of their own fancy. They seem to think that they know better what the Scriptures ought to have been than the prophets and apostles and even the Lord Himself! They tell us when revelations must have been made, and how and where they must have been given, and what their contents could have been, as if they knew more about such matters than God Himself. Imagine a man’s writing the history of the last eighteen hundred years and denying that the New Testament had been in existence during all that time, denying that the Christian church with all its saving doctrines and benevolent institutions and beneficent social system derived from the New Testament had been active and, in a sense, triumphant for at least fifteen hundred years, simply because he could select thousands of examples of superstitious customs, and hellish deeds, and impious words, and avowed agnostics, and Heaven-defying atheists, that have disgraced the pages of history during this time!

“Let us not grovel for the beetles and the earthworms of almost forgotten faiths which may perchance be discovered beneath the stones and sod of the Old Testament, while the violets and the lilies-of-the-valley of a sweet and lowly faith are in bloom on every page and every oracle revealed within the Word of God is jubilant with songs of everlasting joy. The true religion of Israel came down from God arrayed in the beautiful garments of righteousness and life. We cannot substitute for this Heaven-made apparel a robe of human manufacture, however fine it be” (*Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* The Sunday School Times, 1922).

WHY DOES UNBELIEF PREDOMINATE IN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP TODAY?

The fact that unbelief predominates in the field of biblical scholarship today is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy and is further proof of its infallibility. Some 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul looked down through the corridor of time and made the following prediction about the last days:

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. ... Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ... But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. ... For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall

turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 3:1, 5, 7, 13, 4:3-4).

Paul prophesied that the course of the church age will be characterized by increasing apostasy from the truth, by an onslaught of false teachers who will deny the faith, and that is exactly what we see today.

And the apostle Peter concurred:

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Jude saw the same thing:

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ ... These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit” (Jude 1:3-4, 16-19).

These prophecies describe the coming and judgment of Bible teachers who will deny Christ as Lord, which is exactly what Bart Ehrman and his liberal buddies have done.

If the New Testament is a pack of myths and lies, how does it contain such precise prophecies?

NO FACT DISCOUNTS THE BIBLE’S DIVINE INSPIRATION

No fact of science or history or archaeology has ever proven that the Bible is not what it claims to be, the infallible Word of God. The Bart Ehrmans of this world are simply huffing and puffing.

One doesn't have to be a historian and a multi-lingual scholar to see that the Bible is a miracle upon its very face. Its scientific accuracy, its amazing unity, its candor, its power to change lives, its doctrine of salvation by grace without works, and many other things prove that it is the Word of God, and all of Bart Ehrman's huffing and puffing cannot change this. I have studied the Bible diligently for 36 years and have examined the alleged "discrepancies" and errors, and I have found that the Bible is true and its critics are in error. I concur with what the late Robert Dick Wilson told his students, "Gentlemen, the things I do not understand in the Bible I put down to my own ignorance" (David Otis Fuller, June 17, 1987).

MODERN TEXTUAL CRITICISM'S ROLE IN EHRMAN'S SPIRITUAL DOWNFALL

It is not surprising that this man's sad and fearful apostasy is associated with the naturalistic, "science falsely so called" of textual criticism, which tells us that the best text of the New Testament was rejected in the 4th century and not recovered until the 19th and that even this allegedly superior "Egyptian text" is very imperfect. Whereas prior to the late 19th century the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians were confident that the Masoretic Hebrew and the Greek Received texts were the preserved Word of God (see, for example, the Westminster Confession), today there is no such certainty where textual criticism has been accepted. The Greek Received Text has been replaced with a constantly changing so-called "eclectic" text, while the Masoretic Hebrew has been challenged by the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, and many other sources.

In 1910, prominent textual critic F.C. Conybeare said, "The ultimate text, if there ever was one that deserves to be so called, IS FOR EVER IRRECOVERABLE" (*History of New Testament Criticism*, p. 129); and in 1947 R.M. Grant said: "... it is generally recognized that THE ORIGINAL TEXT OF THE BIBLE CANNOT BE RECOVERED" ("The Bible of Theophilus of Antioch," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 66, p. 173).

Edward F. Hills, who had a doctorate in textual criticism from Harvard, understood the destructive nature of this discipline and warned believers about it: "... the logic of naturalistic textual criticism leads to complete modernism, to a naturalistic view not only of the biblical text but also of the Bible as a whole and of the Christian faith. For if it is right to ignore the providential preservation of the Scriptures in the study of the New Testament text, why isn't it right to go farther in the same direction? Why isn't it right to ignore other divine aspects of the Bible? Why isn't it right to ignore the divine inspiration of the Scriptures when discussing the authenticity of the Gospel of John or the Synoptic problem or the authorship of the Pentateuch? ... IMPELLED BY THIS REMORSELESS LOGIC, MANY AN ERSTWHILE CONSERVATIVE BIBLE STUDENT HAS BECOME ENTIRELY MODERNISTIC IN HIS THINKING. But he does not acknowledge that he has departed from the Christian faith. For from his point of view he has not. He has merely traveled farther down the same path which he began to tread when first he studied naturalistic textual criticism of the Westcott and Hort type, perhaps at some conservative theological seminary. From his point of view his orthodox former professors are curiously inconsistent. They use the naturalistic method in the area of New Testament textual criticism and then drop it most illogically, like something too hot to handle, when they come to other departments of biblical study" (Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*).

Bart Ehrman is a frightful fulfillment of Hill's warning, which was first given in the 1950s. Friends in Christ, beware of modern textual criticism.

EHRMAN IGNORED GOD'S WARNINGS

Ehrman's path to unbelief is not surprising in light of the fact that he ignored God's warnings. The Bible warns, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Psalm 1 says blessed is the man "that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

By sitting at the feet of unbelieving Bible critics, Ehrman put himself into the hand of the devil, the "the god of this world" who blinds the minds of those who do not believe (2 Cor. 4:4).

The Bible warns that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). To attempt to study the Bible apart from faith in Christ is folly. In the face of life's greatest mysteries, Ehrman foolishly trusts his own intellect. He has traded faith in the God of the Bible for faith in self, and that is a pathetic trade indeed.

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

Ehrman claims that a turning point in his path to unbelief was his inability to answer the question of why an Almighty God allows suffering in this world. The Bible answers that question, but Ehrman doesn't like the answer so he pretends that it is not a good one.

The answer is that God made man perfect and gave him everything to satisfy his happiness in a beautiful paradise, but man was also made with a will that could rebel against God, and that is exactly what he did. God did not create suffering; man did through his rebellion against God's law. At the same time, God is not only a compassionate God, He is a holy and just God and He punishes infractions of His law. If this were not true, the moral basis of the universe would be destroyed and anarchy would reign (as it does in this present godless world). The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), and God has punished the world for its sin. At the same time, God has made a way of salvation at great cost to Himself. He sent His eternal Son into the world, born of a virgin, to become incarnate as a sinless man and to die a horrible death on the cross to pay the punishment that sinful man deserves. He rose from the dead the third day and commanded that the gospel be preached to all men, offering eternal salvation to those who repent and believe.

God has given men light, but they have largely rejected it. The Lord Jesus said that He gives light to every man (John 1:9). In the epistle of Romans, Paul describes three types of light that men have. There is the light of creation (Romans 1:19-20), the light of conscience (Romans 2:14-16), and the light of Scriptures (Romans 3:1-2). Christ commanded that the gospel be preached throughout the world, and at great cost missionaries have carried out that work for 2,000 years. It is man's responsibility to seek after God (Acts 17:27), and when a man responds to the light that he has God gives him more light. We see that in the case of Cornelius in Acts 10. In 1973 I was crying out to God for help and spiritual light, and God sent an evangelist to me who led me to Christ.

God is not responsible that most men sit in darkness, with all of the pain and confusion that this entails. If the light shines and men close their eyes to it, their blindness cannot be blamed on God.

There is nothing unrighteous about the God of the Bible, but He is God and He does not have to answer to man. God is justified by those who believe. It is not God who has the problem. It is the Bart Ehrman's of the world that have the problem, and it is not a problem that will end at the grave.

Ehrman's problem is with the thrice holy God of judgment. He says he rejected, "This whole business of 'the Bible is your life, and anyone who doesn't believe it is going to roast in hell'" ("The Book of Bart," *Washington Post*, March 5, 2006).

We see that the issue is not scholarship; the issue is God.

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